



The Washington Times

In a Washington Times op-ed published today, the President and Prime Minister of Kenya discuss the implications of last week's historic passage of a new Constitution for the country. Specifically, the op-ed looks at how the new Constitution will strengthen the Kenyan government, create greater stability and prosperity in the East African region, and promote closer ties with the United States. The full text of the op-ed is reproduced below.

Kibaki & Odinga: Kenya's Constitution

Catalyst for closer relations with the United States

By President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga

August 13, 2010

Kenyans young and old from all corners of the country are celebrating the rebirth of our nation. Together, we as Kenyans have taken an enormous step forward by voting for a new constitution. It is a proud moment for Kenya and a great time to be a friend of Kenya. The new constitution will not only strengthen our country; it also will be a catalyst for closer relations with the United States and will advance our joint economic, political and security goals in East Africa.

The constitution represents a momentous step for institutional stability. It decentralizes the government's power, strengthens American-style checks and balances, enables democracy to flourish and provides even greater protections for individual rights. As a result of these changes, democracy in Kenya will be stronger than ever because credible institutions bring lasting stability. Similarly, our country's leadership on the continent and the world stage surely will grow.

Our new constitution, which won a mandate from more than two-thirds of the vote, bears many similarities to the American Constitution. It provides safeguards to prevent any president from becoming too powerful, makes the Parliament accountable to the voters through the recall clause and devolves power to counties (regions), making politicians more accountable to the people they lead and represent. Finally, it creates a Supreme Court and divides the Parliament into two chambers, similar to the U.S. Congress.

The implications of these political reforms extend far beyond our borders. Kenya is an essential bulwark against instability for the whole of East Africa. Kenya's continued stability provides the best opportunity for the East African region and the international community to secure itself from violent extremism and terrorism.

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The political and economic reforms enshrined in the constitution also will make Kenya more attractive to investors in the United States and around the world. Already, Kenya houses the regional headquarters of many large American companies and international institutions, including Google. Information-and-communications technology is one the fastest-growing sectors, with Kenya being a leading global innovator in mobile-phone-based financial and business transactions.

Kenya's economy, which is the largest in the East African Community, has maintained growth through the global economic recession and, in 2010, is expected to grow by more than 4 percent because of the improvements in the business environment. A month ago, the five states forming the East African Community - Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania - launched the common market to promote economic growth within the region by turning all five economies into a single trading and investment destination. We can therefore expect even greater economic progress in the years to come from Kenya and its partners in the East African Community.

On corruption, which has blighted the country's reputation internationally and at home, the new constitution offers robust institutional measures for stemming and eradicating the vice. It spells out new and tough clauses demanding ethical and accountable conduct by public offices and officials. This will reduce corruption substantially by ensuring that only officers who meet the tough integrity criteria are retained in office. Let us not forget that Kenya is blessed with free and vibrant media and a vigilant civil society that relentlessly shines light into all corners of government activity. This will heighten scrutiny in the use of public finances and resources by the executive and legislature.

We are immensely proud of the process by which the new constitution was achieved. It has taken 20 long years of intense and passionate public debate involving every level of society. The transparent and accountable manner in which the process has been conducted will ensure a united acceptance of the outcome of the referendum. We have reached out to those who opposed it and made it clear that no one lost. All Kenyans won on this matter, and we are all the better for it, and so is our region from the adoption of the new constitution.

During our long and drawn-out constitutional process, we drew inspiration from the longevity of the U.S. Constitution. We are confident that the transparent, participative and accountable manner by which we arrived at the new constitution will ensure that it, too, will stand the test of time and provide for Kenyans of this and future generations a stable, prosperous and democratic future.

Clearly, Kenya has traveled a long way in the past two years. The grand coalition, which many commentators expected to last no more than a few months and whose performance was criticized at every turn by our friends, has proved capable of delivering its flagship project, the new constitution, to the people of Kenya. This shows that we have found ways to negotiate and reconcile our differences and also provide united and purposeful leadership for the country at the time it needs it most.

We are pleased with the warm welcome our new constitution has received from the United States, including the warm and positive statement by President Obama, himself connected to our land, who said, "This was a significant step forward for Kenya's democracy, and the peaceful nature of the election was a testament to the character of the Kenyan people."

Mwai Kibaki is the president of Kenya. Raila Odinga is the nation's prime minister.

The op-ed is also available [here](#).

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